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# RIGHT TO BE ACTIVE

Rachel Sandford, Thomas Quarmby,  
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# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## What is this report about?

We wanted to find out what helps or stops care-experienced children and young people taking part in sport and physical activity. We also wanted to explore how care experienced children and young people think and feel about sport and physical activity and what it means for them to take part in it.

**In order to do this, we identified three areas to explore:**

1. How sport and physical activity is provided for care experienced children and young people across England
2. How adults, children and young people think and feel about sport and physical activity
3. How we might make taking part in sport and physical activity easier for care experienced children and young people.

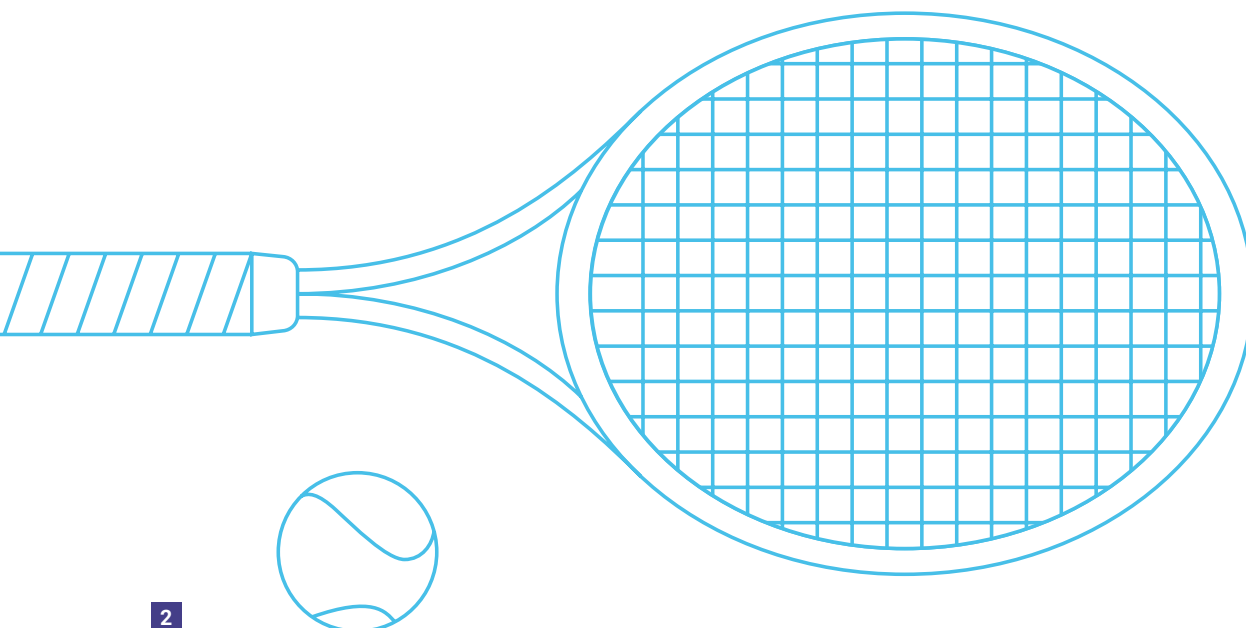
We wanted to write this report to say thank you to everyone who gave their time to share with us their experiences, thoughts and feelings. Without those contributions, this research would not have been possible.

## Why did we do this research?

The number of children and young people in care in England is increasing. Last year, in 2018, there were 75,420 children and young people in care. We know from research that sport and physical activity can help young people in lots of ways, like supporting physical and psychological wellbeing, helping them make friends and giving them a sense of belonging.

The Department for Education and Skills (2007) said that care experienced children and young people should have the same access to sport and physical activity as their friends who are not in care. But we still don't really know much about how well care experienced children and young people can access and take part in sport and physical activity. We also don't know if what is provided for children and young people is different in different parts of England.

So, we wanted to find out more about care experienced children and young people's experiences and work out what works well now and how we might help to make things even better.



## What did we do and who did we speak to?

We carried out our own research from January 2016 to October 2018. This research was made up of 4 stages.

1

- We read through and reviewed some policy documents to see if we could identify how government and other organisations talked about sport and physical activity for care experienced youth.

2

- We created two questionnaires that we sent out to care experienced youth and adults to see what their thoughts and experiences of sport/physical activity were.
- There were **13 complete responses** to the adult questionnaire.
- There were **48 complete responses** to the children and young people questionnaire, from people aged 7-22 years. There were **21 males** and **26 females** (1 did not tell us their gender).
- Most (**69%**) had spent between 2 and 10 years in care and the largest percentage were (or had been) placed in foster care (**75%**).

3

- We interviewed four adults working with/for care experienced youth in two different locations.
- We spoke to **63 care experienced youth** in small groups from **6** different locations across England (the North, West Midlands, East Midlands and three different areas of London). These young people were aged 8-21 years and included **26 males** and **37 females**.
- We also interviewed with **4 care leavers**. These individuals were aged 23-32 years and included **2 males** and **2 females**.

4

- The interesting information that young people told us in stage 3 helped us to create a series of cartoons to share different stories about their experiences.
- Once we had created these stories, we went back to some of the same young people to share the cartoons and see what they thought of them.
- A total of **40 young people** took part who were aged 8-21 years. There were **16 males** and **24 females**.

# WHAT DID WE FIND?

## 1. Voices

### Policy:

After looking at the policy documents we found that:

- When policy documents talk about sport/physical activity for care experienced youth they tend to focus more on general leisure activities.
- It is not clear exactly who is responsible for providing sport/physical activity opportunities for care experienced youth.
- The importance of sport/physical activity for care experienced youth is not always made clear.

### Adult Voices:

After speaking to the adults who work with/for care experienced youth we found that:

- Most adults (**85%**) felt sport/physical activity were '**important**' or '**very important**' for care experienced youth.
- The main benefits linked with taking part in sport/physical activity for care experienced youth were physical (health), psychological (mental wellbeing) and social (peer relationships).
- The main barriers to taking part in sport/physical activity for care experienced youth were low self-confidence (**85%**), lack of interest (**62%**), money (**54%**), transport (**46%**) and a lack of support from friends (**54%**) and key adults (**46%**).
- Adults thought that those most responsible for promoting sport/physical activity for care experienced youth were schools (**92%**), carers (**69%**) and Educational Advisors (**46%**).

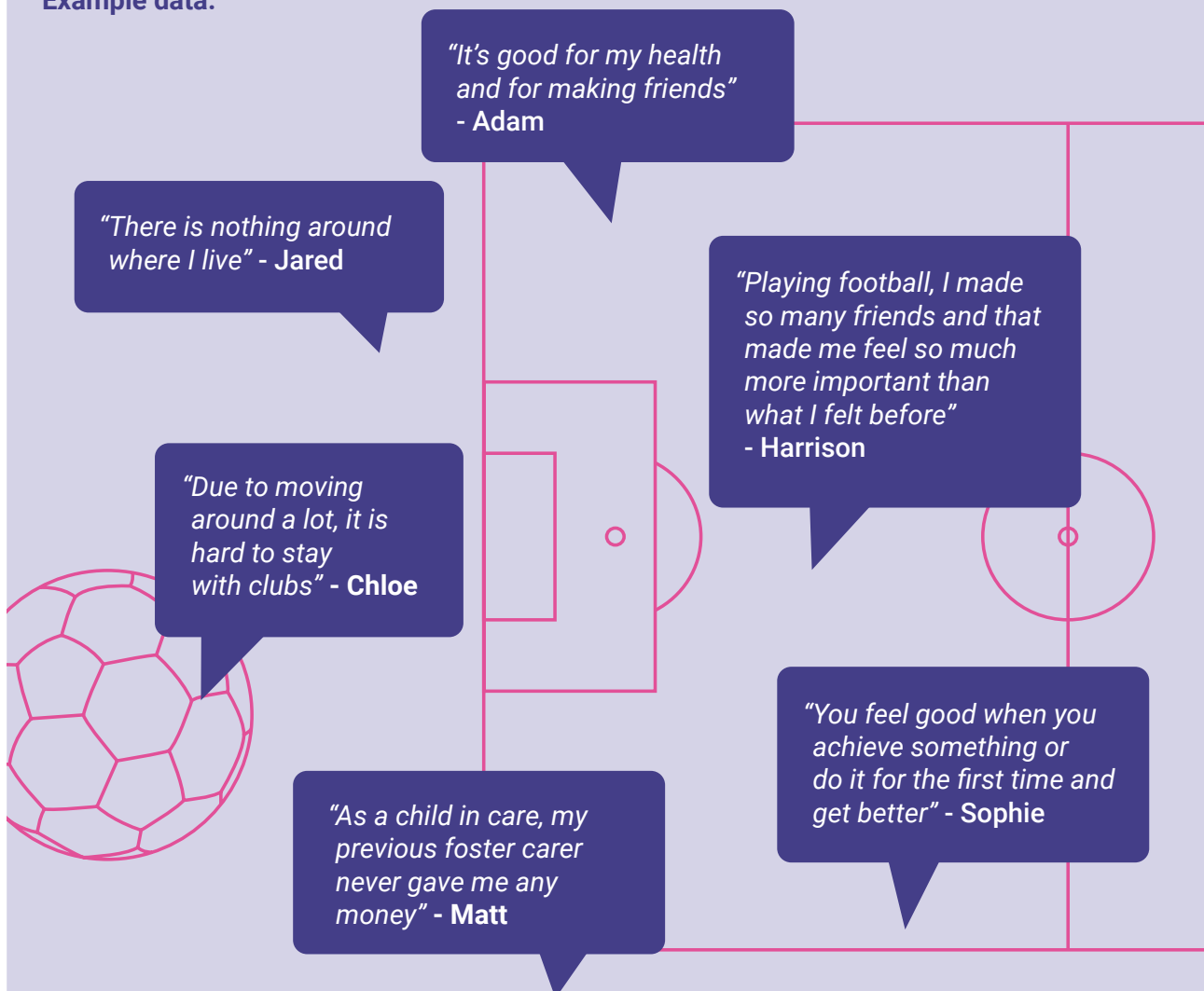


## Care experienced youths' voices:

### After hearing from some young people in care, we found that:

- Many young people (**83%**) thought that sport/physical activity was either 'a little important' or 'very important' to them.
- But, fewer young people (**40%**) felt they had the 'same chances' to take part as friends who are not in care
- The main benefits young people saw from participating in sport/physical activity were positive health outcomes (**70%**); enjoyment (**70%**); social opportunities (**58%**); and skill development (**51%**).
- The main barriers to taking part in sport/physical activity that care experienced youth faced were low self-confidence (**72%**); transport (**63%**); money (**56%**); and lack of interest (**47%**).

### Example data:



## 2. Experiences

Through our research, we identified three main factors that seemed most important in influencing care experienced youths' experiences of sport/physical activity – activities, places and people. The way that these factors did (or did not) link together influenced whether young people had good, bad or average experiences. It seemed that young people needed all three factors to work together in order to have the 'best' experiences.

### Places:

Young people told us there were a number of spaces and places that they took part in sport and physical activity. These included around the home (28%) and school (40%), as well as leisure centres, gyms and other local facilities (62%).

Just 2% of young people said they took part in activities around their residential care home.

Young people did not mention extra-curricular school sport, sports clubs and wild spaces

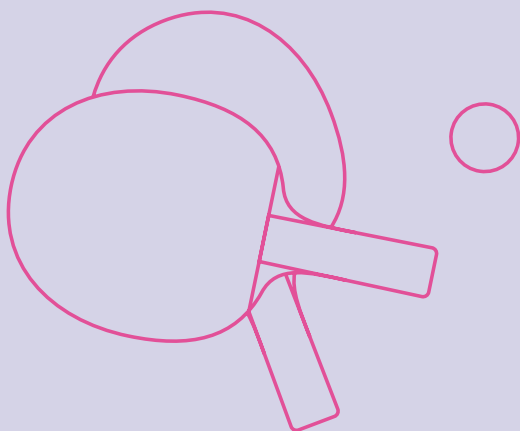
### Example data:

*"I don't really stay for after-school clubs because we have to get the taxi" - Anita*

*"Due to moving around a lot, it was hard to stay with clubs" - Erin*

*"(Care experienced young people) may never have had anyone to take them (to a club), or they may feel embarrassed if their social worker or foster carers took them as they didn't want people to know they are in care" - Louisa*

*"In residential there isn't always enough staffing for young people to take part in these activities (and) not enough encouragement" - Nancy*



### Activities:

Young people told us that they engaged in a range of activities that were both structured and unstructured:

- Unstructured activities that young people most often spoke about were recreational, undertaken in their leisure time and often with family (both foster family and biological family) or friends. These activities include things like **cycling, walking** (sometimes with pets), **scooting, roller-skating** or the use of **parks/playgrounds**.
- Structured activities had a clear focus to help them develop in some way and included activities like doing things with **St John's Ambulance, Air Cadets or Scouts**.
- Finally, 'mainstream' sports like **football, rugby, and table tennis** were another key form of activities, that young people could access through available through local offers

### People:

Young people said that they most often took part in sport and physical activity with their friends (**68%**), foster parents/carers (**40%**), brothers and sisters (**24%**) and foster brothers and sisters (**18%**).

These people help by providing transport to take young people to places and activities, buying kit and equipment and taking part with young people as well.

But, there are also examples of carers who did not/could not help their young person's take part in sport and physical activity.

### Example data:

*"My friends went to a dodgeball centre and they said, 'do you want to come with us?'" - Jamie*

*"I had so many changes of social worker that none of the information was being passed on. I didn't know what was available to me." - Faith*

*"Some carers just don't bother" - Henry*

*"It's easy to do sport, because I have someone who takes me" - Alex*



### 3. Stories:

Other research has shown that stories and cartoons can be a good way of helping people understand the experiences of others. So, after speaking with young people and hearing about their experiences, we created some pictures and cartoons to help tell the stories of how and

why young people in care do and don't take part in sport and physical activity. Some of these pictures and comic strip stories are below.

The speech shown above each of the single pictures combines young people's comments from the group discussions.

**FIGURE 5**

#### Example of standalone cartoon image – 'Multiple Voices'

*"Sometimes meetings stop us doing sport or physical activity. We're always being taken out for meetings...so many people telling us so many different things. Once, at my primary school, I had a PEP meeting and I got taken out of PE - it was my favourite lesson because we were doing football, but I'd got to come for my meeting"*



**FIGURE 6**

#### Example of standalone cartoon image – 'Being Different'

*"Being in care can give you opportunities, like getting free bus travel or gym memberships, which is great. But not everyone gets that and sometimes you can feel singled out when they check your card but nobody else's. Sometimes being in care can make you feel different from everyone else - you don't want to be known as 'the kid in care'."*



## What do you think these cartoons are trying to show?

See if you can write your own stories to go with these pictures. If you want to see the original stories that inspired these cartoons, you can read an outline of them on page 11.

**FIGURE 7**



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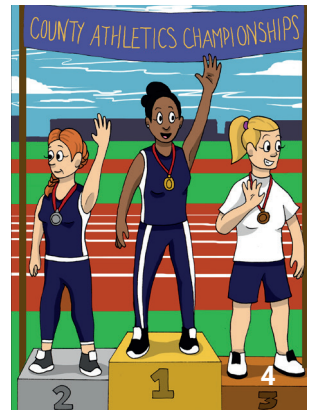
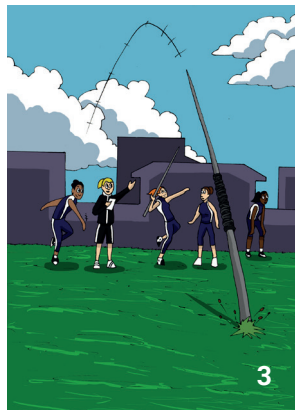
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**FIGURE 8**



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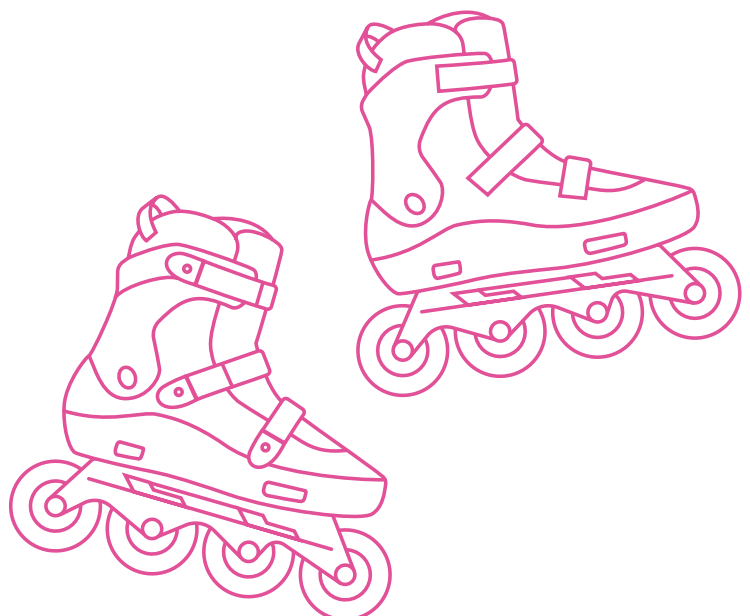
# WHAT DOES IT MEAN AND WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT?

## What this research found was:

- Sport and physical activity can support care experienced young people's health and well-being, build their confidence and help develop important life skills (communication, teamwork, responsibility).
- Young people in care experience a smaller range of opportunities for sport and physical activities compared to their friends who are not in care.
- For some young people, it is difficult to stay involved in sport and physical activity over time because of processes linked to the care system, including child protection; placement moves; funding; and official meetings.
- Activities, places and people were the main factors that influenced care experienced young people's ability to take part in sport and physical activity and all three need to link together to give the 'best' experiences.

## Based on what we found, we think that the following are important messages to share:

1. Policy documents should be clearer about why sport/physical activity is important for care experienced children and young people.
2. There needs to be shared responsibility for helping care experienced youth to access sport/physical activity.
3. We should think more about the role schools could play in supporting care experienced youth to access sport/physical activity.
4. Keeping young people's access to sport/physical activity should be considered in placement moves.
5. More opportunities for care experienced youth to share their stories could help them to have their say.



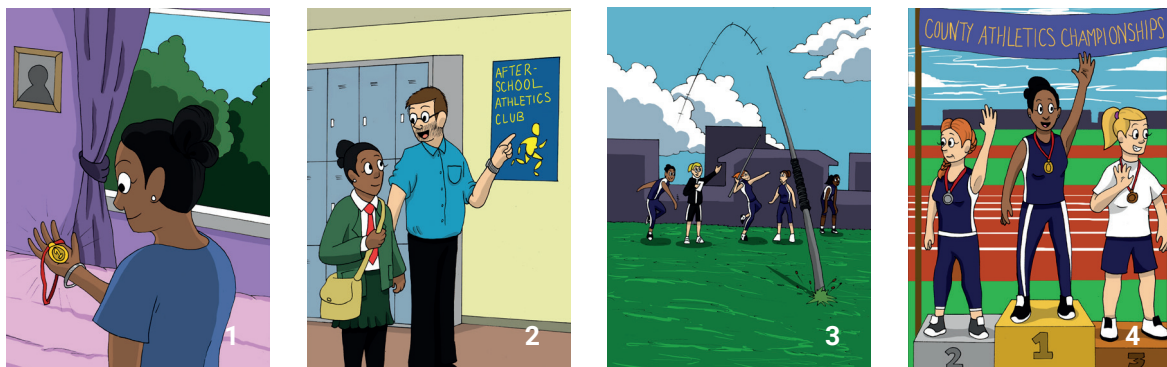
## Original stories

**FIGURE 7** 'New Boy'



This cartoon was intended to tell the story of a young care experienced boy who was starting at a new school following a placement move. He is nervous when he is dropped off because he doesn't know anybody there. While he is at school, the boy takes part in a PE lesson but feels a bit left out because the other children all know each other. He is also wearing the wrong PE kit because he hasn't got his new uniform yet, so this makes him feel different. During the PE lesson, the boy needs to go and meet his social worker, which means that he misses out on the rest of the lesson. At the end of the day, the boy doesn't have someone to collect him but is picked up in a taxi to go back to his care home.

**FIGURE 8** 'Looking Back'



This cartoon tells the story of a care experienced girl who is looking back on a positive experience of sport. She is looking at a medal that she won in an athletics competition and is happy about the feelings this gives her. She remembers that when she was at school a helpful teacher pointed out that she seemed to be good at sport and might enjoy going to an after-school athletics club. This encouraged her to join the club and develop her skills in athletics, which lead to success at school and county competitions. It is a happy memory.

# RIGHT TO BE ACTIVE

## PROJECT REPORT

**If you have any questions or comments to make about this research, feel free to contact us. Please make sure that you check with appropriate adults first:**

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